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ABSTRACT

Excellence in education of gifted children is the focus of this journal theme issue. Two articles are featured: (1) "Making Connections for the At-Risk Gifted Child" by Mary Kay Finholt and Kathy Peckron, describing an exemplary support system developed for at-risk gifted students in the Rockwood School District in Missouri, which provides attention to the child's gifts and interests, is structured so that the student is directed towards controlling his/her own progress and decisions, involves and supports the parents, and provides an advocate for the student; and (2) "Positive Aspects of Full-Time Programming" by Mary F. Toll, which provides a rationale for full-time programs for gifted students, based on their success in Florida, and points out that gifted students require programming commensurate with their abilities, need to be challenged, need to understand their giftedness, and need to be understood by others. John Feldhusen contributes a rejoinder to Rick Ronvik's earlier article on re-examining the foundations of giftedness. In it he discusses conceptions of the term "talent" and contends that matching youth with curriculum and instruction negates the need for either acceleration or enrichment. Regular columns discuss the written language, helping children trust themselves, instructional perspectives, literature resources, emotional development, discrimination against excellence, and asynchronous development. (JDD)

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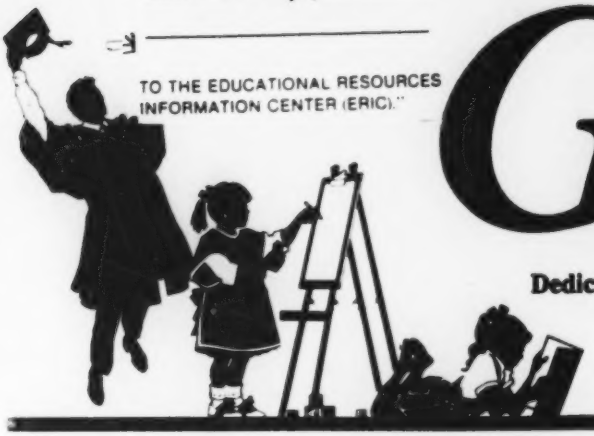

UNDERSTANDING OUR GIFTED®

Dedicated to helping gifted children reach their full potential

November—December, 1993

Volume 6, Issue 2

Making Connections for the At-Risk Gifted Child

Mary Kay Finholt, M. S.
Kathy Peckron, M. S.

Many gifted students are high achievers, but some students' gifts are outweighed by disabilities and emotional problems. Unfortunately, their very high potential does not guarantee superior coping skills, and in some circumstances, giftedness can actually be an aggravating factor. Those who live and work with these bright pennies know that gifted children are not immune to poor self-esteem, social and emotional problems, learning and attention deficits, and underachievement. Gifted children themselves perceive their predicaments all too clearly. When a fifth grade boy with learning and attention deficits was asked about the status of his academics, he replied," I believe we are witnessing the beginning of my decline."

The Dynamics of Underachievement

In her book, *Giftedness, Conflict, and Underachievement*, Whitmore (1980) states that the positive traits of the gifted can be associated with many of the difficulties they face. For example,

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FOCUS ON:

EXCELLENCE REVISITED

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Positive Aspects of Full-Time Programming

Mary F. Toll, Ed.D.

Programming for gifted students, where it exists, usually takes the form of a variety of pull-out or resource models, such as two hours a day, one day a week, or even a few hours a week. A programming model worth examining is the full time model for gifted children. In essence, full time programming can be defined as services provided all day for students. It can be housed at stand alone centers, schools within schools, or magnet schools.

In this era of inclusion for students with disabilities, it is important to remember that gifted students are also exceptional students with abilities that need to be nurtured and developed to their fullest potential. The least restrictive placement for a disabled child may be the regular classroom, whereas this is often the most restrictive environment for a gifted child. Grouping gifted students for instruction is essential in meeting their needs (Rogers, 1991). VanTassel-Baska (1988) stresses the importance of intellectual discussion among peers. School restructuring efforts to date have missed the

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FROM THE EDITOR

Happy Holidays

It is quite fitting that we chose the theme "Excellence Revisited" for this issue in light of the fact that the new report just released from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) on November 5th is entitled *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent.* We delayed the publication of *Understanding Our Gifted* so that we could include up-to-date information about this report. (Please see Kathi Kearney's and Dorothy Knopper's columns; See page 19 for information on how to obtain a copy.) It has been over 20 years since the U. S. Government issued a report on the status of gifted children, and it has received a great deal of media attention. But there are proposed changes in the Javits Gifted and Talented Program that could be very harmful to our children. (See my column, page 15.)

Now is an excellent time to run for your local or state School Board, organize a parent advocacy group, join an on-site management team at your child's school, or appeal to your local school board on behalf of gifted children. At the very least, **we urge you to contact members of the Senate and Congress.** Ask that the Javits Act be returned to its original wording and that the National Research Center be kept in the Act. And *tell your stories* about life with gifted children. [Call (303) 837-8378 for FAX and phone numbers of every member of Congress.] Timing is everything, and it looks like the timing is right for advocates of gifted children to be heard.

In this issue, we re-examine excellence from a variety of perspectives. Mary Kay Finholt and Kathy Peckron describe an exemplary support system they have developed for at-risk gifted students in the Rockwood School District in Missouri. Dr. Mary Toll provides a rationale for full time programs for the gifted which have been successful in the state of Florida. And Dr. John Feldhusen has contributed a rejoinder to Rick Ronvik's controversial article on "Re-examining the Foundations of Giftedness" in our July-August issue. We are excited to offer this kind of intellectual dialogue in our journal.

Thank you for all of your letters commending our philosophy and staunch support of giftedness in *Understanding Our Gifted.* We hope that our journal will inspire many courageous attempts on your part to make certain that the needs of gifted children throughout our nation are responded to appropriately.

Linda Silverman

UNDERSTANDING OUR GIFTED

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Deirdre V. Lovecky

IDDEN GIFTED LEARNER

The Written Language Problem

Throughout history, thinking has been synonymous with both reading and writing. An educated person has been one who could put ideas to paper, and indeed, original thought has had little prospect of an audience unless it was first written.

In today's age of visual media, many gifted children consider written communication passe. They are unwilling to invest the amount of time and energy to develop the skills of written expression that gifted children spent in Leta Hollingworth's time (only 50 or so years ago). Her accounts of exceptionally gifted children are replete with discussions of what the children wrote both at home and at school (Hollingworth, 1942). Despite the fact that many of the children had handwriting more like agemates than mental age peers, most did not regard this as a handicap or try to avoid writing.

Today's gifted children appear to regard writing differently. Those children who like to write still spend time developing both handwriting and expressive writing skills. However, fewer children appear to like to write, and those who don't like it refuse to try, rather than learn the skills involved anyway as children did 50 years ago.

There are several reasons for writing refusals in gifted children besides learning disabilities. The first of these is sex-role stereotyping; that is, today's boys tend, much more than boys 50 years ago, to see the things boys do and don't do in rigid stereotypes often dictated by media images. Not only would boys not think of playing with items they deem "girlish," they often refuse to do tasks at which they see girls excelling. They see math and science as "boy's subjects." Reading is sex-role neutral especially if the material refers to either boys' specific interests, such as sports, or the broad area of science, including science fiction. Writing is seen as a girl's subject, especially creative writing and poetry.

Another reason for avoidance of writing involves the lack of development of patience. Today's children are raised in a world of instantaneous communication via media and computer networks. Information is ever present. Many gifted children make the mistake of assuming that the information itself rather than its incorporation into a body of otherwise integrated knowledge is what's important. They prefer to be like computer hard disks storing up information until the disk is full rather than understanding the value of a slow integration of data to form new ideas, to clarify previous misconceptions or to form structures of thought from which one can categorize and prioritize ideas. The mechanism of writing allows these processes to occur. Today's child merely wants the data filed in mind for quick recall but with no attempt at organization.

Finally, children today often seem to lack the imagination that results in the creation of written language. They tend to seek images from media, and use them in predetermined ways. This ties the child to quick-reflex responding to problems rather than to a more reflective, slower processing of possibilities. The child may be information rich but process and structure poor.

Lacking skills in written expression is a problem. Quick reflex-like information processing with minimal reasoning and integration allows one to respond quickly in an emergency but is a weak means for developing long term perspectives. Putting ideas into words allows their transformation from a primitive inner personal reality to a more generalized communication in which one must consider other people.

The ultimate consequence of thinking that written language is for girls, unimportant, and not worth developing, is that gifted children who hold these ideas become uneducated and uneducable. They do not learn the skills needed to develop their gifts and are handicapped in a world where ideas are still the commodity of fruitful exchange.

REFERENCE

Hollingworth, L. S. (1942). *Children above 180 IQ Stanford Binet: Origin and Development.* Yonkers, NY: World Book.

Deirdre V. Lovecky, Ph.D., is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Providence, Rhode Island, and a frequent author of articles on giftedness in children and adults.

Annemarie Roeper

PARENTING

"Mom, What is Excellence?"

This was the question Lisa asked her mother when she came bursting through the door after school. Her mother saw that she had tears in her eyes.

"What's the matter? What made you ask?" questioned her mother.

Lisa threw her arms around her. *"Martha's paper got a comment saying it was 'Excellent.' I only got a 'Good.'"*

"Did the teacher say anything else when you talked to her?"

"She said I made some spelling mistakes and mistakes in punctuation. Some sentences were not structured that well. But she said the essay was quite nice."

Her mother knew that the essay had meant a great deal to Lisa. She had worked very hard on it and it expressed some thoughts and feelings that had been buried deeply in Lisa's soul. Her mother knew Lisa was hurt by the teacher's lack of understanding and that Lisa needed her support. She, herself, had been moved by Lisa's essay. It was about the secret life in a pond, about the fish and frogs, how they were swimming and playing, how they were born and how they died. She wrote about the algae on top of the pond and the plants hidden beneath it. People walking around the pond knew nothing about the secret teeming life right in front of them.

Lisa's mother consoled her: *"You really loved your story. It was your creation. Your teacher didn't understand it, but when you look at your own story, you will know why. Your teacher didn't see the secret life hidden in your inner 'pond'—your soul. You and I both know it was excellent. It was well written in your own style. You could have written it a little more neatly and carefully. But I want you to know I loved your story and what is more, you loved it."*

Excellence is in the eye of the beholder. Lisa's mother was teaching her an important lesson with several implications. Don't judge yourself by somebody else's standards who does not understand you. Trust yourself. This is an important insight for the gifted as they encounter this situation often. It is hard for gifted people to believe in themselves when they are confronted with the negative judgments of others.

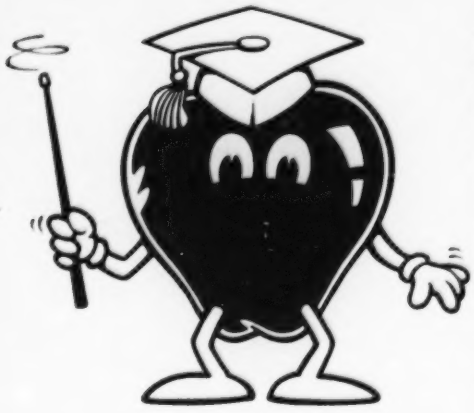
Having her mother's support helped Lisa to build trust in herself. However, she still needed to cope with the reality of the teacher's judgment. Lisa liked her teacher and they had a good rapport. She felt something was now broken between them. When mother and daughter talked about this aspect they decided Lisa would share her reaction with her teacher. Her reason was not that she wanted to set the record straight but because she wanted the teacher to understand her reaction.

When Lisa told her teacher how meaningful the essay was to her, what her thoughts were about it, how hard she had worked on it, her teacher listened attentively and seemed to understand. Lisa said, *"When I wrote this story I wanted to express my thoughts about how often people don't know what goes on around them or how others feel."*

Her teacher said, *"And this is exactly what you feel has happened between you and me, right? I'm glad you felt free to talk to me and I think I really understand it better now."* She put her arm around Lisa. *"You loved writing the story, and it disappointed you that I didn't seem to love reading it. It feels excellent to you."* When the teacher reread the story she suddenly realized what a lovely, sensitive story it was. *"Why don't you rewrite it, because you do know there are some mistakes in it, and then turn it in again and maybe you'll be surprised by the new comments."* Lisa felt proud and greatly relieved for having dealt with the situation honestly.

Realistically, we know that such a resolution may only happen in a small number of cases. For this reason it is most important for parents to help their children to trust themselves in the face of lack of empathy from others.

Dr. Annemarie Roeper is a consultant on the gifted in Oakland, California, and author of the book, ***Educating Children for Life.*** Co-founder of the Roeper City and Country School and the ***Roeper Review***, Annemarie has inspired a worldwide focus on global awareness in gifted education.



INSTRUCTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

In my mind, the burning question is whether excellence in public education can be *re*visited; has our public educational system *ever* achieved overall excellence? Or, have spots of excellence always existed, but never been generalized or generalizable? Having asked this question, I choose to leave its answer to others, who are more knowledgeable in such matters than I. To me, the more pertinent question is, what *is* achievable excellence for public schools, and what would this excellence mean for the gifted child?

In this article, I will focus on examining some elements of public school excellence and what its achievement would mean in a general way for gifted students. I will consider excellence in teaching, student achievement, and curriculum, fully realizing that many elements and factors are being ignored.

One of the critical elements of excellent education is, or course, teachers. If we are to have educational excellence, teachers must value academic excellence for themselves and their students. They must conduct themselves as eager learners alongside their students. Teachers must care about their students as people and as lifelong learners and problem solvers. Part of this caring is caring enough to push their students toward excellence.

Student achievement is a benchmark of excellence. Parent, student, and teacher expectations all affect achievement. The issue becomes what level of achievement we should expect of a given student. I suggest we borrow from athletics and sports in this regard. P.E. teachers are fully aware of varying abilities and aptitudes, but they expect every able-bodied child to master certain skills and the operational basics of a variety of team and individual sports. Transferring this to academics, all students should be expected to master basic communication and problem-solving skills and to build on these according to their varying abilities and aptitudes. The minimum competency level should *never, never* become the general expectation.

Excellent curriculum is open-ended, flexible, and relevant to the learner. Its applicability to life is apparent because it is presented, practiced, and learned within real-life contexts. Additionally, it is challenging *at least some of the time* to every student.

When gifted students have a teacher who values academic excellence and models learning as an exciting endeavor, they feel as if they have found a soul-mate. They will forgive other shortcomings and work devotedly for such a teacher. In response to this and expectations of excellence, they can achieve at appropriate levels, especially within the structure of open-ended, relevant curriculum.

Being an optimist as well as an idealist, I believe the elements of excellence I have mentioned are achievable in public education. If educational excellence were to be valued by our society as a whole, change would follow. Further, I believe this achievable excellence would especially benefit gifted learners, because they are the population with the biggest excellence gap—that gap between expectations or curriculum and the achievable.

Shirley W. Schiever, Ph.D., is a curriculum specialist at the Fine Arts Magnet School in Tucson, Arizona, and the author of ***A Comprehensive Approach to Teaching Thinking***.

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Stephanie S. Tolan

HE READING ROOM

In this visit to the Reading Room the topic is the unusual powers of the human mind, and the single book is British author Peter Dickinson's *The Healer*. In an earlier visit we discusssed Dickinson's eerie and challenging book, *Eva*. This is an author who takes chances, who writes intellectually complex novels with fine and compelling stories.

The protagonist of *The Healer*, which is set in contemporary England, is 16-year-old Barry Evans, an extremely bright working class high school dropout. The story is told through his viewpoint and he creates the considerable action. However, the real center of both the book's plot and its thematic mystery is Pinkie Proudfoot, the strange, quiet, plain-looking ten-year-old girl Barry befriended more than two years before. Not quite eight then, she had understood on first seeing him in the school corridor that he was having a "bad head." She had immediately taken his hands and—*had she really?*—made one of his terrible, intractable migraines go away.

Perplexed and grateful, aware that she was new in town and vulnerable, Barry began watching over her and interceding for her on the school bus, on the playground, and eventually with her aloof and solitary mother. On occasion he took her by bus to see her eccentric, wheelchair-bound grandfather in another town.

As their strange friendship grew, Barry had tried (and failed) to explain to himself Pinkie's apparent "powers." Though she was frequently clumsy, confused by the demands of ordinary life, uncertain about such things as math, she appeared to have access to other realms of mind, and often knew things about him he had told no one, sometimes things he had barely allowed himself to know. And he had felt the warmth that moved through him at her touch as she took his pain away. And there was Pinkie's grandfather's insistence that she had taken away the "phantom pain" from his amputated leg.

Now, two years after he last saw her at her eighth birthday party, at which her mother forbade him to see her again because he had mentioned her healing powers, he has (with her grandfather's help) tracked her down. Pinkie is now the centerpiece and main attraction at a "research" organization known as The Foundation where crowds of people pay 400 pounds each for a healing "experiment." Dr. John Freeman, a charismatic blond Moses-look-alike, heads The Foundation, oversees the experiments, and writes scientific papers about the Harmonic Energies that Pinkie is able to channel for healing.

By now Barry has convinced himself that there are ordinary, rational explanations for Pinkie's apparent abilities. The Foundation, its cures and its claims, he believes, are frauds. Freeman, now Pinkie's stepfather, is exploiting her and bilking the public. Pinkie adds to his conviction by secretly letting him know she wants to get away.

The plot, though many-layered and complex, is tight, tense and suspenseful. Barry takes a menial job at The Foundation where he sets out to prove to himself that everyone there is a charlatan. Surely the apparent calm, cheer and goodwill that pervade the institution are faked or imaginary. After he discovers Freeman is drugging Pinkie to try to enhance her success, he determines to rescue her over apparently insurmountable obstacles.

Is Pinkie a healer? Are her powers real? Are there unseen energies converging at an ancient circle of standing stones? Is Freeman a fraud or a genius or both? Dickinson, true to form, offers no easy answers, for characters or for readers. There are no clear good-evil dichotomies here to keep one safe. The book leaves its readers pondering a realm of energies that are, if they exist, like gravity and electromagnetism—invisible and thus far inexplicable. A source of endless, fascinating discussion—give it to a group of bright kids and stand back!

Stephanie Tolan, from Columbus, Ohio, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, ***Guiding the Gifted Child.***

KALEIDOSCOPE

Revisiting a Place We've Never Been

It's hard to return to a place we've never been, but as our field of gifted child education matures, that is exactly what we must do. For more than 20 years, our school programs and services for gifted children have focused on *intellectual* development—not surprising, considering that high abilities were what brought gifted children to our attention in the first place! However, theorists and practitioners alike have come to interpret intellectual development in very narrow ways, so that our school programs are focused in only three areas: content, content, and content. In the rush to take advantage of the academic talents of children, we have chosen to bypass the very characteristics that often distinguish them from their classmates—maturity of insight, heightened sensitivity, and emotional dissonance.

Blame this on the accountability movement, or on our national rush to prove that our standardized test scores can beat any of our global neighbors' kids. But whatever the source, one thing is certain: our most capable students are too often seen as automatons, able to generate or regurgitate knowledge that would do them well if their career goal was to be a master at *Jeopardy*! I don't mean to downplay the ability of a 12 year old who scores 800 on the SAT math test, nor do I mean to diminish the aptitude of a junior Bobby Fisher. But isn't there something more, something deeper, to this idea called "giftedness"? I think there is.

As our field looks toward new directions, I hear the term "talent development" being used more frequently. If this implies *emotional, aesthetic* and *empathic* development, then I'm all for it. However, if it implies (as I think it does) that we're just seeking a term more palatable to the public than "gifted," then I'm afraid we will continue to promote the same practices that have been around for years. Same outfit, new label.

Parents and other educators must be on their guards to ensure that the rush to develop talent goes beyond the obvious. If once again we focus all or most of our attention on academic gifts, or the societal benefits to enhancing the education of gifted children, then we will surely be making the same mistakes as in previous generations. Our most able children need to know how to love as well as how to reason, for these talents are most certainly the ones that are most lacking in our increasingly technological world.

> *After you understand about the stars and the sun and the rotation of the Earth, you may still miss the radiance of a sunset or the brilliance of a rainbow.*
>
> **Alfred North Whitehead**

So, next time you are at school, participating in a parent conference concerning your child's progress, ask the teachers about the importance they place in developing *emotional* talents. It's a place in the curriculum we haven't visited often enough, but it's a place we need to revisit again.

Jim Delisle, Ph.D., teaches at Kent State University and is the author of five books, including *Guiding the Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Youth* (Longman, 1992).

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perfectionism, a trait common to giftedness, can lead to feelings of always falling short of expectations, whether these expectations are self-imposed or imposed by others. The ability to think critically can cause the child to be openly critical of others. Some gifted individuals are years ahead intellectually, and yet struggle to fit in socially. Their high energy level, self-directive nature, wide range of interests, and need for tasks that require abstract thinking, rather than drill, place these children in conflict with the curriculum, the teacher, and their peers. Even when school tasks require higher level thinking, some gifted students remain unmotivated. Underachievers have a tendency to become engaged in assignments only if they are of special interest to them.

Some profoundly gifted students are so distracted by their own thoughts that they rarely tune into class lecture and discussion, and often do not know what has been assigned. An exceptionally bright student explained his tendency to "tune out" during class: *"Sometimes I believe that my mind is like an enormous room with many doors. These doors represent all the things I need to think about."*

The presence of learning disabilities may eclipse the strengths of a gifted child. Learning disabilities or processing deficits camouflage the gifts, and the gifts mask the learning difficulties (Silverman, 1989). Average or low achievement scores, average or low grades, and uneven performance on intelligence tests, resulting from these disabilities, may preclude these students from qualifying for gifted programs. Even if insightful teachers and parents recognize that there is gold to be mined in this student, they may also believe that if the student cannot achieve in the regular classroom, placement in a gifted program would be inviting more problems. With the best of intentions, much time and attention is devoted to the problem behaviors, and the gifts remain unrecognized or unaddressed. A parent commented that, before her daughter's placement in the Connections Program, her child *"...was on a collision path with failure. I could see a future of unhappiness and complete burnout with life for her, and there wasn't much I could do with the system labeling her a 'problem.'"*

MAKING CONNECTIONS FOR THE AT-RISK GIFTED CHILD

- **with the students and their gifts**
- **between the student's choices and the resulting outcomes**
- **between a student's effort and achievement**
- **with achieving models**
- **with their peers so they can feel a part of, and not apart from**
- **among parents so they can offer support and successful strategies to each other**
- **among the home, the school, and the child in order to foster collaborative efforts**

The Connections Program

The Rockwood School System's Connections Program for At-Risk Gifted Students uses a comprehensive approach because we believe the negative mechanisms of underachievement are interrelated. Therefore, the Connections Program implements the following strategies:

- *Identification of the "hidden gifted"*
- *Attention to the gift through Talented and Gifted (TAG) Program participation, mentoring, and use of community resources which would utilize the student's strengths*
- *Advocacy and support for the student at the child's school*
- *Parent support and involvement*
- *Programs for improving social skills*
- *Techniques for teaching decision-making and goal-setting.*

Identification

1. It was our intention to improve the ability of teachers and counselors to recognize giftedness in students who were not achieving. The Connections teacher held workshops with the staffs of selected elementary schools to explain the characteristics of the targeted student, the purpose and structure of the Connections Program, and the use of the Identification Checklist [adapted from Whitmore's (1980) "A Checklist to Identify Gifted Underachievers" (p. 237)]. A booklet comprised of related information was distributed to counselors and staff.

2. As nominations were received, a *Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Third Edition* (WISC-III) was administered to each nominated student by the TAG psychometrist, unless a valid IQ score was available.

3. The Connections teacher conducted structured interviews with teachers and parents of nominated students, using questions adapted from Whitmore's (1980) checklist and Baum, Dixon & Owen's Structured Interview Form (1991, p.65). The questions focus on the child's outside interests as much as on school performance. Often, the same child who avoids schoolwork with a maddening passivity may be pursuing avid interests at home,

although sometimes in very narrowly focused ways. We hear repeatedly from parents and teachers that these students tend to exhibit gifted behaviors more frequently when they are very interested in an activity. This information weighed heavily in the selection process.

4. The interviews indicated whether the student was exhibiting one or more of the following behaviors: poor self-esteem, poor social skills, distractibility or inattentiveness, resistance to efforts to motivate or discipline, disorganization, failure to complete assignments, or a vast gap between the quality of oral vs. written work.

5. With the guidance of the psychometrist, subtest scores of the WISC-III were examined by the Connections teacher and TAG counselor. As recommended by Silverman (1989) and Baum, Dixon, and Owen (1991), we found it useful to look beyond the Full Scale IQ score to detect indications of giftedness. Subtest scores in the 16-19 range are considered to be in the gifted range, but these can be overshadowed by low scores which cancel their effect in the Full Scale IQ score. [For a more complete analysis of WISC scores, see Baum, Dixon and Owen (1991) and Silverman (1989).]

Our experience has borne out the validity of using subtest scores to identify giftedness. Students with some subtest scores in the gifted range, and Full Scale IQ scores in the superior range, have been succeeding in the TAG program, with appropriate accommodations. Based upon his Performance IQ score, which was in the gifted range, a fourth grade boy who had been diagnosed as having attention deficit disorder and learning disabilities was placed at the TAG center for afternoons. The reports on this child's progress at the TAG center have been enthusiastic. "*He is so bright! He has so much knowledge about science and he uses it creatively!*" Although he has social difficulties to be addressed, his parents report an improvement in his self-esteem. Before TAG placement, the child's regular teacher had said during the teacher interview, "*I have never seen him smile.*"

6. The Connections teacher interviewed the students to assess their interests, approach to tasks, and social and emotional characteristics. All at-risk gifted students were served.

Program Components

Attention to Strengths

Attention to the gift is critical for this population. Experience with gifted underachievers and gifted learning disabled students has shown that, when given the time, resources and support to develop their interests and gifts, at-risk gifted students often begin to show improved achievement and adjustment (Baum, Dixon, & Owen, 1991; Emerick, 1989).

The Rockwood School District TAG Program offers a resource component in the child's school and a once-per-week attendance at the district's Center for Creative Learning (CCL). This dual program and the structure of the day itself at the district's CCL have made it possible to gradually integrate these students into the TAG program as we learn more about their strengths and needs. Afternoon "Kaleidoscope" classes provide a comfortable inaugural experience with a gifted program for the at-risk gifted student. These classes are hands-on, high interest, exploratory mini-classes which change every nine weeks. They are intellectually rigorous and foster creativity, but are not particularly oriented toward traditional academic skills and format. There are as many as 12-15 classes from which to choose, allowing the Connections teacher, parents, and Connections student to select a topic in the student's areas of strength and interest.

Since the majority of the at-risk students experience difficulty with written expression, the TAG teachers encourage the use of tape recorders, dictation, and final products which do not require a lot of writing. Students with reading problems were able to take books home to receive assistance from parents. Because of the small classes, students who require emotional support were able to solve problems with their teacher or the TAG counselor as difficulties arose.

In addition to the appropriateness of the curriculum of the CCL, much of the success of these students was due to the flexibility and skillful handling of the Connections student by the CCL teachers. Several students eventually began to attend a full day at the CCL and, with accommodations to their special needs, are adjusting well to the demands of full-day participation.

Our experience has borne out the validity of using subtest scores to identify giftedness.

Mentoring

A mentoring program is underway with several students. The Connections teacher is supervising each mentorship, providing support and guidance to the process to insure maximum success. The mentors are community businesspersons who devote at least two hours a week with their mentee on special projects of interest to the student. This format has excellent potential for improving self-

esteem by fostering a positive relationship with an achieving model, helping the student make a connection between school and real-world skills, and developing the student's talents.

Under the direction of his mentor, a sixth grade student with an interest in carpentry and science has built a hovercraft. He will have an opportunity to offer a ride on the vehicle to students at his school. With the guidance of an electrical engineer, another student has designed and built a printed circuit board, resulting in an audio-oscillator which produces an equally tempered musical scale. Both students have attracted a lot of positive comments from other students and teachers as the projects were being built, and both boys will make a presentation to their science classes.

Student Support

The Connections teacher met individually with the students for at least once a week. The following strategies were implemented according to each student's needs:

1. The Connections teacher provided opportunities for some of the students to do hands-on science activities and to pursue topics related to their interests. Through these experiences, the Connections teacher became familiar with each student's strengths, needs, and learning style so that a well-informed decision could be made regarding the likelihood of success for the student at the CCL.

2. The Connections teacher became familiar with the resources within each student's school which had potential for developing the student's strengths. Some examples are arranging for a student who is an avid reader to read to a first grade class on a regular basis; pointing out ways in which a student's abilities with computers could foster leadership in the classroom; involving the student in the science fair; and suggesting ways in which art abilities could be utilized.

3. Using a format derived from Heacox (1991), the Connections teacher taught goal-setting procedures to selected students. The model requires the student to be in charge of the process and to plan, in advance, strategies designed to overcome possible obstacles. Incentives were also discussed with an emphasis on non-material rewards, such as having more control over their own schedules, spending time with a parent, or earning a special privilege.

4. Since many gifted at-risk students have poor time-management and organizational skills, the students, with the assistance of the Connections teacher, designed their own system for assignment management. This technique is usually most effective with sixth graders and above, particularly if the students request this help, are actively engaged in the process of creating the system and the incentives, and are allowed to make changes as the need occurs.

5. This weekly meeting also provided a positive relationship with an unconditionally accepting adult. In some cases, this relationship seemed to be an important part of the student's motivation to improve. Many of these students experience negative feedback from peers, some teachers, and sometimes parents. Wittingly or unwittingly, the child is often inviting negative reactions: a negative cycle is then established. The meeting with the Connections teacher provided a time when the student could experience positive interaction in the context of working toward changing self-defeating behaviors.

6. The Connections teacher acted as an advocate for the student with the classroom teacher, as well. The teacher received information related to the student's personality, strengths and needs, and support for his or her efforts to meet the student's needs. It is important to note that teacher selection is critical. The most effective teacher for underachievers is one who recognizes small successes and improvements, maintains appropriate expectations, and does not take the lack of interest or effort personally. This is a difficult balancing act.

7. Regular teachers, through a weekly communication form, related student progress to the Connections teacher. This information could be shared with the student, used to measure progress toward goals, and shared with parents.

8. For several middle school students, a once-per-month meeting that included parents, teachers and the student was conducted. (See Scammahorn, Scammahorn, & Woythal, 1990.) The intention of this component is to encourage the students to become part of the change process. Ideally, students will, through practice, increase their comfort levels in advocating for themselves, learn to set goals, and hear from teachers regarding their progress toward those goals. The students are encouraged to write the agenda for the meeting, make copies for all in attendance, decide whom to invite (minimum of one parent and one teacher), and lead the meeting. The Connections teacher needs to caution the regular teachers in advance that emphasis should be on positives, recognizing

small successes, and allowing the students to be equal partners in these business meetings.

9. The Connections teacher's close and cooperative working relationship with many of the students' special education teachers made a significant contribution to the students' successes. The combination of knowing the gifts and the deficit areas added to the comprehensiveness of the program.

Parent Involvement

The Connections teacher or other school counselors facilitated several parent group meetings throughout the school year. Some parents shared the relief they felt when they realized other families were experiencing similar difficulties. This normalized their experiences, allowed them to see the competencies they possess as parents, and enabled them to share successful strategies.

Beginning this year, the parents of middle school students will meet for eight sessions with a counselor who is experienced in working with adolescents and their families. We feel the consistency of working with the same counselor over a period of time may assist parents with the added challenges of adolescence.

Also, on a limited basis, the TAG counselor and the Connections teacher met individually with parents to assist with strategies for dealing with the child's behavior in the family. Commenting on her own improvements months later, one girl said, *"It's kind of like a biography! At the end of some biographies, the main characters get their act together when they are 60 years old. I managed to do that at age 10!"*

The TAG counselor also conferred with the Connections teacher on a regular basis on issues that arose with the Connections students. This professional support and guidance was essential because so many of the at-risk students' issues are counseling related.

The Connections teacher's frequent phone calls to parents kept them apprised of the student's progress. These calls also provided encouragement to parents when their child's progress was disappointing. This program attempts to provide a safety net for the student and for the parents given the challenges they face with their child. Parents were encouraged to provide positive reinforcement for germinal successes.

Peer and Social Skills Groups

Because social interaction difficulties are common to this population, we are adding a regular peer-group meeting for the elementary students. The meetings, which will be conducted by the TAG counselor, will provide an opportunity for students to gain insight into their own social behaviors and to learn and practice social skills.

First, the TAG counselor will conduct the peer-group social skills training. Then the students will join in a recreational or creative activity, like decorating t-shirts or playing mini-putt golf. We have paired seniors from the local high school community service class with each student to provide a good role model for social skills and to assist in the activities. The TAG counselor can use the behaviors demonstrated at these get-togethers in the context of the social-skills group meetings. This may facilitate transfer of the skills learned in a group to an actual social situation. We plan to conduct these meetings twice a month for four months. During alternate student meetings, the parents will meet to discuss issues they have identified as important to the parenting of their gifted child.

Conclusion

A program for at-risk gifted children needs to provide attention to the child's gifts and interests, be structured so that the student is directed towards controlling his or her own progress and decisions, involve and support the parents, and provide an advocate for the student who will oversee the change process and provide unconditional positive regard.

The Connections Program attempts to help at-risk gifted children make meaningful social and emotional connections with others and with that which is finest within themselves. It was to facilitate these "connections" that our program was developed.

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opportunity to raise ceiling levels for gifted students as well as provide challenging environments for them.

An optimal learning environment for gifted children addresses their academic, emotional, and social needs. Full time programming models not only honor the holistic experiences of these special students but also provide the following benefits:

♦ ***The development of a curriculum framework for meeting the academic needs of gifted students in all content areas.*** The opportunity to integrate subject matter and the flexibility of time to explore concepts in depth on a daily basis enable true differentiation of curriculum strategies for this population. Gifted students have the opportunity to experience a cohesive approach to content and skill development. Gaps in learning rarely occur, as these children are not missing blocks of instructional time—a drawback of pull-out models.

♦ ***Elimination of disjointed times for gifted instruction.*** Gifted children do not turn on their giftedness from 1:00 to 3:00 on Thursdays or only on Wednesday mornings. Giftedness is a 24-hour-a-day phenomenon. Less disruption in the gifted child's instructional day is an additional factor to consider in a full time model.

♦ ***Support and understanding for the emotional and social dimensions of the gifted.*** Working with peers on an extended, daily basis is a tremendous plus for these students. Discussing sophisticated mathematical concepts and not feeling weird or strange about that discussion does wonders for developing positive self-concepts (Delisle, 1992). Teachers of the gifted can offer discussions of the unique sets of problems that face the gifted (Colangelo & Peterson, 1993). Realizing that other students with similar abilities and interests feel different from their peers, have problems, or need assistance in developing strategies for coping with situations, provides a solid foundation for the prevention of possible future social and emotional problems.

♦ ***In addition, full time programming is more cost effective than pull-out programs, since it does not require additional staff.***

Combatting Misconceptions

Support for comprehensive services for the gifted can be gained when misconceptions about full time programming have been eliminated. Some of these misconceptions include:

♦ In full time programs, gifted students will not learn to get along with all types of students.

♦ Gifted students will become "elitists" if they are grouped together.

♦ Gifted students may not need full time programs as they usually are not gifted in all areas.

The above misconceptions can be addressed in the following ways:

First, students who are identified as gifted come from all economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. When they are placed with their intellectual peers, they still learn how to relate to all types of individuals. Most full day programs are housed in heterogenous schools, where gifted students can interact with students in other classes during recess, lunch, art, music, physical education and other activities.

Second, the accusation of elitism is unfounded. Gifted children are *less* likely to develop elitist attitudes when they find other children brighter than themselves than when they are the smartest in the class (Silverman, 1993).

Third, gifted children, like other children, have areas of strength and weaknesses. These discrepancies can be addressed in the self-contained class by differentiated instruction. In addition, full time programming can have a pull-out option built into the model that would permit students, as needed, to attend other content area classes based on their areas of need.

One Model

Some school districts in the state of Florida decided to develop full time programming for gifted students based on the preceding benefits. In Palm Beach County School District, a district-based study related to the needs of gifted students was undertaken first. Committees were established in order to study the feasibility of different program models and to make recommendations on essential issues, such as early identification, curriculum, instructional strategies and policies about acceleration. After exploring a number of alternatives, self-contained classes were recommended as the most beneficial model to implement. Full time programming was considered the least restrictive environment for the gifted. It was decided that this K-5 district would phase in the plan over a three- to four-year period.

Full time programming was considered the least restrictive environment for the gifted.

Center schools, schools within regular elementary schools, were selected as the mode for implementation of the model. Approximately one-third of the total school population in these kindergarten through fifth grade schools was composed of gifted students. Feeder elementary schools

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF FULL TIME PROGRAMMING Continued from page 12

were identified to send their gifted students to the full time center schools.

Instruction was focused on differentiated curricula in all content areas. Specific guidance and counseling sessions were also incorporated into the program. Activity periods, through areas of interest, were developed so that the entire school population would have an opportunity to get acquainted with each other.

Part time resource pull-out programs were to be eliminated as the phase-in occurred. The end result was approximately 13 elementary gifted centers with approximately 200 gifted students at each center.

Initial reaction to the full time center plan was mixed. Pro and con forces rallied. Concerns, as expected, centered around transportation, "elitism," and a possible "brain drain" on the feeder schools. The district conducted a series of information sessions outlining the transportation plan, issues related to curriculum, and rationale for the full time programming model. Support for the program grew and the school board decided to implement the model on a one-year pilot basis with one full time gifted center. Data were to be collected from the pilot center before a decision on full implementation would occur.

Research from the pilot year of the program found gifted students to be in favor of the program, parents in support, and teachers enjoying the instructional experience. The teachers found that these students came to them with instructional gaps. They felt that full time programming assisted in eliminating these gaps. Students commented on less disruption; they could stay with one teacher all day and receive the instruction they needed. They were also supportive of the guidance and counseling component, believing it helped them understand their giftedness and deal more effectively with their areas of stress. Standardized scores on the SAT, as well as scores on the Developing Cognitive Abilities Test (DCAT), continued to show high levels of achievement for the students. Parents who initially had concerns about the program were pleased with the full time approach. Early identification of gifted students was enhanced by the inclusion of kindergarten and first grade classes.

As of August 1992, 13 elementary full-time centers have been established serving over 2,000 elementary gifted students. Teacher training in issues of giftedness, curriculum strategies, and guidance and counseling needs of the gifted, as well as district awareness of the program, have contributed to the success of the expanded operation of the full time gifted program. Students, parents, and teachers believe this program is a step toward addressing the 24-hour-a-day phenomenon of giftedness.

Conclusion

Receiving an education which is appropriate and commensurate with one's abilities should be the goal of all education. Gifted children are almost always ahead of regular classroom instruction. For these students not to be able to learn new concepts is a lack of appropriate planning for the gifted as well as a waste of their school time. Unchallenging educational experiences for the gifted can also lead to behavior problems and underachievement.

It is important to remember that gifted children cannot always make it on their own. They require programming commensurate with their abilities, they need to be challenged, they need to understand their giftedness, and they need to be understood by others. Full time programming is an approach to meeting these needs.

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Foundations of Talent: A Rejoinder to R. W. Ronvik

John F. Feldhusen, Ph.D.

While we applaud many of the common sense insights presented by R. W. Ronvik in "Reexamining the Foundations of Giftedness,"[UOG, 5(6)] recognize the excellence of services for gifted youth in Chicago schools, and agree with his assertion of the basic role of acceleration in teaching the gifted, we nevertheless disagree with several of the criticisms and assertions made in the article and in the six guidelines offered at the end related to talent, acceleration, and enrichment.

We turn first to his discussion of the talent concept which he sees as simply a matter of terminology. He says "The problem is no one seems to know what it means, or perhaps more accurately everyone thinks it means something else" (p.8). Given over a decade of talent searches throughout the United States and the hundreds of educational programs that grew out of them, it is almost incredible to say no one knows what "talent" means. The leaders of talent searches have defined clearly and operationally the abilities they assess.

It should also be noted that the distinguished University of Chicago scholars, Benjamin Bloom and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, have published major scholarly works reporting on "talent" and its development: *Developing Talent in Young People* (Bloom, 1985) and *Talented Teenagers, the Roots of Success and Failure* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993). Both of these scholars seem to understand that talent denotes specific aptitudes or abilities that can be developed in young people.

Furthermore, the term *talent* seems to have more meaning than "gifted" and "gifted education" which have diverse meanings. In school practice an incredible variety of tests are used and misused as well as widely varying cutting levels in the identification of "gifted" youth. Furthermore, "gifted education" ranges from weekly pullout sessions of as little as 30 minutes to full-time educational programs, and all with widely varying curricula.

A further problem is the statistical naivete of selecting and labeling children as gifted or not gifted using what Ronvik calls "credible" measures (p.10). What are those "credible" measures? Does he mean intelligence tests? Or achievement tests? Both are quite good predictors of long range achievement but also quite fallible. We will label "gifted" some who will never achieve at a high level, and we will classify some who have high potential as "ungifted." Why can't students be selected for programs on the basis of specific needs (precocity or advanced talent) and given accelerated instruction without being categorized and labelled as "gifted"?

The term "talent" denotes a specific focus on the special aptitude or ability of a student. Ronvik argues in his third guideline that educational services should be directed to the "areas in which a student has been identified as gifted" (p.10). Does Ronvik really propose that "area" is a better term than talent?

The concept of enrichment advocated by Ronvik as depth and intensity focused on subject matter is ambiguous. Depth and intensity may be akin to conceptual abstractness and complexity, but these characteristics can be subsumed under the acceleration umbrella. They characterize the higher age or grade level to which precocious children should be advanced to meet their needs in their specific talent areas, as Ronvik suggests in his third guideline or principle (p. 10). Thus, the concept of enrichment may be unnecessary. Acceleration subsumes all!

Inconsistencies in the definition and application of enrichment and acceleration are characteristic of the general confusion in our field about these concepts. Categorizing educational interventions as one or the other is not realistic. **All curriculum and instruction for talented youth must be presented at levels, pace, abstractness, and complexity appropriate to their levels of intellectual precocity.** Ultimately there is no acceleration, just matching youth with curriculum and instruction that affords an appropriate challenge, given their levels of prior achievement.

In summary, we agree with Ronvik's enthusiasm for acceleration and his assertion that "Gifted program classes should take on the same subject matter as the school's regular program" (p. 10) but conclude that he is wrong in accepting enrichment as a service for the gifted along with acceleration and dismissing the concept of talent. Renzulli and Reis (1991) stated the case well recently when they said "Talent development is the business of our field..." (p. 28). The time is at hand to focus educational program services on the specific talents of youth and above all to ensure that the services are appropriately tailored to their needs.

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Linda Silverman

Personality Plus

Asynchrony

The concept of giftedness originated in the field of psychology, specifically as a part of the study of individual differences. Over the years, it lost its psychological focus and became imbedded in the field of education. It was adopted by Curriculum and Instruction, and the search began for an elusive differentiated curriculum for the gifted. As Ronvik (1993) has shown in his article "Re-examining the Foundations of Giftedness," [*UOG, 5*(6)] the longed-for curricular answer was never found. While wonderful new teaching strategies and content were experimented with in resource rooms, the question was perennially raised, "Why isn't this good for all children?" As there was no satisfactory answer to the question, gifted education came to be the research and development arm for regular education.

In recent years there has been a great outcry against any type of special provisions for the gifted, and many, many administrators in public, private and parochial schools across the nation can be heard saying, "I don't believe in giftedness." From the viewpoint of psychology or special education, this makes about as much sense as saying, "I don't believe in retardation" or "I don't believe in individual differences."

The extent to which we have lost sight of the gifted as a population with special needs is clearly demonstrated in the proposed changes to the Jacob Javits Gifted & Talented Program: "*By the end of the third year of a grant, each project would have to expand gifted and talented programs to serve all students in a school.*" (*Congressional Briefing Book*, part of the ESEA Reauthorization to be voted on by Congress.) Would this make any sense at all if we were talking about children with severe developmental delays instead of developmental advancement?

What went wrong? How can educators not believe in what parents live with every day? I feel we went astray by severing the relationship between giftedness and psychology. Psychologists are no longer involved in the identification of the gifted. In 1972, Public Law 91-230 stated that "gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons...." In 1978, "professionally qualified persons" was removed, and in the 1993 OERI report, *National Excellence*, the use of test data has been questioned. The report even states that preschool and primary children "should not" be identified as gifted (p. 28). The educational needs of the gifted stem directly from their psychological needs, and these needs are apparent in early childhood.

Two years ago, we introduced a psychological definition of giftedness in the January issue of *Understanding Our Gifted* in Martha Morelock's (1992) article: "Giftedness: The View from Within." The following definition has become central to the philosophy of our journal:

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally. (The Columbus Group, 1991)

This means that gifted children develop in an *uneven* manner, that they are more complex and intense than their agemates, that they feel out-of-sync with age peers and "age appropriate curriculum," that the internal and external discrepancies increase with IQ, and that these differences make them extremely vulnerable. Their greatest need is *each other* in an environment in which it is safe to be different. IQ tests may not predict who will become famous, but they do give at least a minimal estimate of the degree of the child's asynchrony, and, therefore, vulnerability.

Lately, the term "asynchrony" has taken on another meaning, in Howard Gardner's new book, *Creating Minds*. Gardner (1993) uses it to describe tensions generated by an imperfect fit between the accomplished adult and his domain or the field judging the quality of the individual's work, or in the individual's development in different domains. He hypothesizes that too little or too much asynchrony will not be fruitful to creativity. Gardner's use of the term once again removes it from the psychology of inner experience, and we are left looking only at the externals of achievement.

The new OERI definition suffers from the same emphasis on "performance," "achievement," and "accomplishment." When will we begin to recognize that giftedness is a *psychological reality* that must be responded to lest we destroy these children?

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Kathi Kearney

THE HIGHLY GIFTED

Discrimination against Excellence

The U. S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) recently issued the first national report on the education of gifted children since 1972. The report is wide-ranging, with a focus on anti-intellectualism in American society, the needs of underserved gifted children, and a status report on gifted education in the 1990s.

Less than a week after the report was released, *The New York Times* interviewed the young mother of Jonathan Estrada, a highly gifted bilingual four-year-old boy above 160 IQ. He is reading at the fifth-grade level, and is a geography whiz. The local public school recently made drastic cuts in its gifted program. Jonathan's working-class parents own a deli, and can't afford private school tuition. The boy's mother says, "*I want to know what do we do with this boy? He's dying to learn... I'm not looking for handouts, I'm looking for some place to send my child*" (Winerip, 1993, p. B19).

The new federal report has little good news for the Jonathans of this world. Indeed, some of its findings, such as the sheer depth of anti-intellectualism in American schools, are deeply troubling. Taunts of gifted students, such as "nerd" and "dweeb," are common (p. 13). Some gifted African-American students who choose to achieve academically are accused of "acting white" (p. 13).

For years, educators of gifted children have been encouraged to cooperate with general education. However, in the rhetoric of school reform, little has been written about the responsibilities of general education to its most gifted students. They, too, are required by compulsory attendance laws to attend school. Even the most profoundly gifted child is part of the community of "all children," mentioned so often in the literature of school reform.

Each time a taunt based on a child's exceptionality (such as "nerd" or "dweeb") is permitted in the classroom or on the playground, each time a highly gifted child is deliberately held back academically, each time a school policy prohibits academic acceleration or continuous progress, we need to ask, "What messages are we giving *all children* about developing talents, about the value of academic achievement, and about intellectual diversity?" The school climate needs to support all students—including the most gifted. We would never allow racial or ethnic slurs to go on unchecked in today's schools, nor would we deliberately thwart the intellectual growth of a child with a disability. Yet, profoundly gifted children (and their families) routinely must deal with these issues, based not on disability but on extreme developmental asynchrony. General education has a fundamental responsibility to these children.

Education's Responsibility to the Highly Gifted

✦ *In Hippocrates's words, "First, do no harm." School personnel must read the literature on extreme giftedness, and take the time to understand the individual child. Real damage has been done to these children by well-meaning professionals who insisted on maintaining institutional policies and philosophies at the expense of a child's development (Gross, 1993).*

✦ *The school climate must be free from taunts and jeers based on race, sex, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or ability. Every child not only has a right to be in school, but is required to be there by law. It is the responsibility of the school to maintain a school climate that will not be hostile to any child.*

✦ *Itellectual diversity must be respected.*

✦ *Strategies that have proven effective for extremely gifted children—acceleration, continuous progress, intensive enrichment, and access to academic opportunities without discrimination on the basis of chronological age—must be regularly available. For profoundly gifted children, access to such strategies is essential in order for them to learn, much as other strategies are essential for children with disabilities.*

✦ *Extremely gifted children must neither be ignored nor exploited in school. Certain popular educational strategies, such as cooperative learning, can exploit these children, especially if they are permitted no time with intellectual peers and no regular, daily access to curriculum at an appropriate level of difficulty.*

School is a place for learning. The message we give to *all children* about learning is linked in part to how we treat our most rapid learners. If they are ignored, exploited, damaged, held back in their progress, or teased, the message we give to all children is that academic learning doesn't pay for anyone.

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IN SEARCH OF SERENDIPITY

Fairy Tales, Part I

Fantasy is the most valuable attribute of the human mind and should be diligently nutured from the earliest childhood.
Choukovsky

On this journey we will travel to the France of Perrault and the Black Forest of the Brothers Grimm. Fairy tales are wonderfully rich literature for developing the creativity and imagination of youth. There are no limits to the kinds and numbers of creative products students can create in response to their interactions with fairy tales.

Students may observe other people's creativity and originality by examining some current retellings of classic fairy tales that are delightful. In *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* by A. Wolf, Jon Scieszka gives the wolf a forum to tell his side of the story. He only went to the first little pig's house of straw to borrow a cup of sugar. Could he help it if his sneezing fit destroyed the little pig's home? *The Frog Prince Continued* is a further whimsical treatment of a fairy tale in which Scieszka explores the proposition that perhaps the princess and the frog did not live happily ever after in the palace. Fiona French brings Snow White into the modern era marvelously in *Snow White in New York*. In a most clever twist, Bernice Myers tells the story of a young man who yearns to be a football star in *Sidney Rella and the Glass Sneaker*. Students will quickly see the resemblance between Sidney's story and that of Cinderella. Once students have read and enjoyed these creative stories, they will be motivated to create their own innovative retelling of classic fairy tales.

One of the most recent and charming creations is *The Jolly Postman* by Janet Ahlberg and Allan Ahlberg. Riding his bicycle, a jolly English postman delivers letters and notes to fairy tale characters that include the Three Bears, Cinderella, and B. B. Wolf, Esq. B. B. Wolf's letter is from a legal firm representing Little Red Riding Hood. They inform the wolf that he must quit wearing LRRH's grandmother's clothing and that he should vacate her grandmother's cottage immediately.

The responses of students to fairy tales will be rich and diverse. Creative drama is one good place to begin imaginative explorations. A *tableau* is a still-life scene depicting a moment in literature. It may be compared to a "stop action" shot in cinema. Divide students into groups and ask each group to dramatize five scenes from a classic fairy tale in five tableaux so that when revealed in sequence the five scenes tell the story of *Little Red Riding Hood, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty* or *Hansel and Gretel*.

Students can create wonderful improvisations based on classic fairy tales and modern interpretations. For example, they can bring to life scenes artistically portrayed in *The Jolly Postman*. How might a scene between the wolf in grandmother's clothes and Little Red Riding Hood's attorney be played? An ogre has disappeared from the neighborhood. Has he been murdered? Creative students can improvise and act out a clever murder mystery based on Puss 'n Boots. Incidentally, a superb example of artistic creativity may be seen in the lush illustrations Fred Marcellino conceived for Malcolm Arthur's translation of Charles Perrault's *Puss in Boots*.

On our next journey, we will explore many creative writing encounters young people can have with fairy tales.

(Continued on page 18)

Mary Lynn Baum

from parent to parent

More on Valuing Parents: Valuing Ourselves

At the recent National Association for Gifted Children meetings in Atlanta, I had the opportunity to meet a number of parents and educators who are living with and working with gifted youngsters. I was struck again by the number of people involved professionally with gifted children who have been impelled to work in this field because of their personal experiences as parents of gifted children. Many of us, however, don't give ourselves much credit for the expertise that we gain while "just a parent." The "imposter syndrome" is alive and well among parents of gifted children.

A conversation I had with one woman was especially instructive. Cathleen will soon complete her doctorate in the education of the gifted. She is no newcomer to the field, however, having reared three gifted children, the youngest of whom is 23, a talent search alumnus and current graduate student. When I questioned Cathleen about entering the field as a parent first, she remarked, "Even now that I'm finishing my Ph.D., when I get among these professionals, I always feel self-conscious and insecure."

As difficult as we may find it, we parents need to rid ourselves of that sense of inferiority among "the professionals." We need to recognize our own strengths: we not only have valuable perceptions about our own children—which some teachers and schools are beginning to acknowledge—we also have (to varying degrees) a specialist's knowledge of the field. Many of us have seized every opportunity to attend workshops about gifted children and their educational and social/emotional needs. Usually these sessions have been presented expressly for parents by support and advocacy associations; more rarely, we have had opportunities to sit side by side with teachers in professional development sessions. Whatever the nature of the workshops, however, many parents of gifted children have had far more training about the education and psychology of the gifted than most classroom teachers.

It is understandable that some teachers might find this situation threatening, especially if they think that those parents will want to tell them what and how to teach. I don't think that's what most parents want, however. What we do want is to be involved in a meaningful and substantial way in the decisions that affect our children. Despite the current talk about effective partnerships between parents and the schools, there is little question about who is the junior partner in the relationship—or about who holds the power. This balance needs to change.

The other side of this issue, though, is that we parents have to stop thinking of ourselves as "just a parent." If we want "the professionals" to think of us as colleagues, we need to start thinking of ourselves in that way as well. If our children's needs are to be met, parents, teachers and counselors need to work in a fruitful collaboration on their behalf. An important step toward that collaborative effort is seeing ourselves as *equal partners* in the endeavor.

Mary Lynn Baum is past president of the Gifted Children's Association of British Columbia, Canada, editor since 1983 of its newsletter, *Bright Connections*, and the parent of a highly gifted teenager.

Fairy Tales (Continued)

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Dorothy Knopper

ANTENNA . . . .

Current Developments in Gifted Education

This column is subtitled *Current Developments in Gifted Education*. I have searched for years for a sensational happening to write about in our long-suffering field. Now, at last, the United States Department of Education has published a new report, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1993). It is certainly current, but will it be the **DEVELOPMENT** I've been waiting for?

The document begins with a description of a "quiet crisis in educating talented students" (p.5). Quiet? Judging from the newspaper coverage across the country (*New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Denver Post, USA Today*) resulting from the published report, the situation seems anything but quiet.

According to *Chicago Tribune* columnist Joan Beck (1993), "*It* [the report] *squeaks when it should roar. It suggests when it should demand. It talks in educationese when it should blow a trumpet* "(p.31).

National Excellence does contain some powerful data about the poor performance of America's top students, elementary through college and into the business world. It points out the lack of challenging curriculum for our brightest students who consequently do not compare favorably with their counterparts in other countries.

The report states that schools must identify gifted and talented students through a system that:

- *Seeks variety*
- *Uses many assessment measures*
- *Is free of bias*
- *Is fluid*
- *Identifies potential*
- *Assesses motivation* (p.26).

The national report concludes with recommendations for action:

- *Establish challenging curriculum standards*
- *Establish high-level learning opportunities*
- *Ensure access to early childhood education*
- *Expand opportunities for economically disadvantaged and minority children*
- *Encourage appropriate teacher training and technical assistance*
- *Match world performance* (pp. 27-29).

Not since *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, the 1983 report published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, has our country admitted such educational neglect among our most gifted students. There are other sounds of hope. The resolution adopted by delegates to the National Education Association Representative Assembly in September, 1993, begins with the following statement:

> *The National Education Association believes there must be increased development of fully funded educational programs for gifted, talented and creative students* [(Announcement in *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 1993, *17*(1), 3)].

And just the other day I heard from a reliable source that the president of a prominent university gets more calls concerning gifted education than any other single issue.

No, the crisis is not quiet. It's earsplitting and overwhelming, more like a heavy-metal concert than a lullaby. The new report has the power to be that **DEVELOPMENT** we're waiting for. It's up to us to make sure that it's loud enough to hear.

Publisher's Note:
***National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* can be ordered from the U.S. Government Printing Office, (202)783-3238, order #065-000-00603-1.**

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